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SPELLING REFORM

BIKKERS

INTERNATIONAL PRONUNCIATION TABLE

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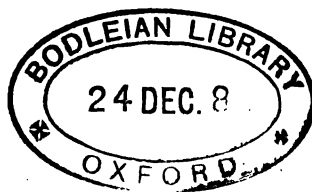
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THE QUESTION OF SPELLING REFORM.

BY ALEX. V. W. BIKKERS.

THE question of Spelling Reform has now assumed the shape and dimensions of an obvious necessity. No one could ever have doubted the reality of such a necessity, had he but cast even a cursory glance on the amazingly anomalous state of our so-called Orthography.* First, as Mr. JONES has well remarked, there are close upon 3,000 words, the spelling of which remains at present undecided. Secondly, the scientific student of language places but little reliance now on the guidance of our dictionary-makers. Thirdly, the number of symbols in present use is altogether insufficient to denote even the most common sounds uttered by English speakers, *unless*, indeed, we have recourse to certain *judicious distinctions* and a few *natural combinations*. To question the wisdom, or to doubt the necessity of *some* kind of Spelling Reform, at this juncture, would be simply to stultify oneself. Both the *advisability* and the

* In Professor HERRIG'S "Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen," 2 tes Heft, 1876, a clear-headed contributor does not scruple to refer to the *German* "system" of Orthography as "execrable!"—Is "amazingly anomalous" then too strong for *ours*?

expediency of such a measure have been admitted on all hands worth counting ; by the practical instructors of young children—than whom no better judges there could be ; by such men as Mr. GLADSTONE, and the late Bishop THIRLWALL ; finally, also by the foremost scientific philologists, whose “ etymological bias ” was at first (innocently) suspected as likely to interfere with the desire for alterations in the present “ system ” of spelling. It is not the least remarkable feature in the universal history of Spelling Reform that it is precisely the soundest men in linguistic science that have given the warmest support (be it only hitherto a moral one) to any such general scheme of Spelling Reform as might tend more or less in a desirable or right direction. Professor MAX MÜLLER has quite recently favoured us with his views on the subject in the March number of the *Fortnightly Review*, 1876 ; Mr. SKEAT soon followed his example in *The Athenæum*, and before either of these philologists had spoken, Professor WHITNEY * had already raised his voice from across the Atlantic in a bitter satire on the would-be etymological zealots. To myself it is a mystery that any person pretending to even the most superficial knowledge of the history of the English tongue should ever have ventured to defend our present spelling—*by virtue of its etymological worth !* *Rhyme* with an *h*, because the *h* does *not* occur in the Anglo-Saxon parent word ; *rime*, on the contrary, without an *h*, although the Anglo-Saxon had *hrim*. *Citizen* with a *z*, merely through the

* Oriental and Linguistic Studies ; “ How shall we spell ? ”

accidental confusion of two entirely different characters.* Who now remains to defend such grossly absurd vagaries? We may then safely maintain that the time for *some* Spelling Reform has fully arrived; that the expediency of *some* measure of an amended Orthography has been admitted on all hands; but the great and final question still to be settled is this: from what principles are we to start? on what basis are we to proceed? On this point, I venture to say, we have decidedly advanced one great step, at any rate. Both Professor MAX MÜLLER and Mr. SKEAT — indeed others before them — have condescended to recognise the principle, viz.: that any *new, hitherto unknown, arbitrary, meaningless, or impracticable* symbol should be rigidly excluded from all systems of “Reformed” denotation. If Spelling Reformers could be induced to put this principle into practice we should have advanced another step.

To an earnest and practical reformer the question: how shall we spell? involves the still more important one: how are we to pronounce? I am thinking here of the very difficult question: is there any possibility left of reconciling American and English “orthoepy”? And I regret to answer: I see no chance of it. When we find the most philosophic and most influential of transatlantic philologers argue like this: “*I will never condescend to pronounce homage with the aspirate;*” when we are further enabled to gather from Prof.

* The y symbol in the old French word *citeyen* (modern French *citoyen*) was mistaken, from the mere accident of its shape, for the early-English character 3; this was not, indeed, the z with the tag, but the letter which, from the 12th to the 14th century, took the place of Anglo-Saxon g.

WHITNEY'S own writings* that there are in American English at least twelve words (all in ordinary use) in which the *u* sound differs from that which it *unquestionably* bears among the educated people of England—then we may well despair of arriving at a rational and practical compromise between the two great differentiating branches of the English tongue.

If I have ventured to dwell at all on this lamentable international difficulty it is chiefly because :

1st.—This point has been generally overlooked by both English and American spelling reformers ;

2nd.—Because it leads us on to consider *home* difficulties.

Some such difficulties appear to me to be these. Both Mr. ELLIS and Mr. HENRY SWEET represent the sound of *ch* after *n* (as in *bench*) like that of *ch* in *chin*. I am afraid that this is contrary to every-day usage, and that a finicality of this kind would prove greatly detrimental to the practical study of English by foreign scholars.

Another case I would venture to mention is this : It has been suggested by one of our best and most thoughtful philologists, the Rev. W. W. SKEAT, that we should always show the precise pronunciation of each word. Mr. ELLIS and Mr. SWEET appear to be of a different opinion. Their own denotation points, in fact, to the contrary direction. Such differences, in a scheme of vital importance, do really disclose the

* I take Professor WHITNEY as an illustration, not only because of his very high position as a philosophic student of language, but because he is better entitled, as a *living* man, to enlighten us at a distance on the present or modern pronunciation of American English. The fact of Mr. WHITNEY referring even to his age and parentage, deals out a hint which, I trust, will not be totally lost on those jejune foreigners who will still flock to WEBSTER for advice on *English* orthoepey!

fact that all spelling reformers have hitherto overlooked the possibility and advisability of adapting a new denotation to meet the requirements of foreigners as well as of natives.

The principle of adapting a new and improved denotation to the requirements of other nations has been admirably kept in view, and most consistently carried out by Colonel CLINTON in his "International Pronunciation Table," (Hachette & Co., King William Street, Strand, 1877.)

The publication of Colonel CLINTON's method led to a private correspondence, from which I am permitted to select the following passages, which, I consider, are fairly representative of the author's scheme.

Professor WHITNEY asks the question, how shall we *spell*? you very appositely ask the *question* how shall we *pronounce*? The question still remains to be asked: how shall we *denote sounds*? Surely, the *last* of these three questions ought to have been decided *first*. For how can we, with any degree of precision, determine any matter pertaining either to spelling or pronunciation, until we shall have agreed upon a generally recognised system of denoting sounds?

Of all the various proposals for phonetically denoting the pronunciation and spelling of English, there are only two, which I have the means of placing in comparative view with the one embodied in the "International Pronunciation Table," these being the method adopted by Mr. A. J. ELLIS in his "Glossic Orthography," and that proposed by Mr. E. JONES in his "Popular Education" (F. PITMAN, 1875). In the publication of Mr. JONES the Parable of the Prodigal Son is denoted, in parallel columns, according to the above-mentioned two latter methods of denotation. As I submit a portion (*vide* appendix) of the Parable to you, you will observe that the nine verses present a comparative view of the three ways of Mr. ELLIS, Mr. JONES, and myself of symbolising sounds. I need not point out to *you*, but I doubt whether it has been generally considered, that there is a vast

difference between the two tasks which "Spelling Reform" may set itself; the easier one is to determine which is the simplest possible method of denoting the actual phonetic pronunciation of English; while the far more difficult and delicate task is that of determining what modification of any such method would be acceptable for the *practical* reform of our so-called orthography.

The peculiar advantages attached to the CLINTON proposal for symbolisation appear to me to be the following:—

I.—The method is easily mastered.

II.—It is *possible* for English people to read their own language, so denoted, even without the addition of the figures or diacritical marks.

III.—In a dictionary, so denoted, no key-line at the top of each page is needed.

IV.—It can be used in writing if the writing is nearly upright.

V.—It is serviceable for the symbolisation of all languages, and between all languages.

I fully appreciate the far wider scope of Colonel CLINTON'S "International Pronunciation Table," the method of which (notwithstanding its wider aim) seems to me simpler and, therefore, more practical than either of those with which it is compared. Colonel CLINTON'S plan requires no new symbols; even the marks are none other than the figures 1, 2, 3, already in daily use by the children of all nations; and these diacritical marks do not, even in number, come up to the three accents, the *tréma* and the *cédille* of the French. Finally, in Colonel CLINTON'S plan, the vowel sounds are arranged in such a manner as to be easily learnt and remembered; while the symbols have the advantage over those of any

other method on this important point: that they can be used for *writing* as well as for *printing* purposes.

I will now briefly state what, I consider, should be included in any thorough-going proposal for spelling reform.

It has been remarked by a writer in a German Magazine, that our only hope of success with a reformed orthography rests with the rising generation. This view, although a somewhat desponding one, may not be far wrong. But the natural inference to be drawn from such a proposition seems to me to be this: that all such *elaborate* systems as those of Lepsius, Melville-Bell and others might be called utterly worthless, except for the specific purposes to which they are directed. It appears to me that, next to the two fundamental principles: (a) of universal phonetic symbolisation, and (b) the phonetic naming of symbols in each language, there would arise a third point of importance, that of symbolic economy. By this I mean that, as much as possible, the simplest symbols should be used for the most often recurring sounds; and that the more complicated symbols (wherever they might be required) should be reserved for the less frequently used sounds. Take the case of the two sounds of our English *th*. By merely following the Dictionary, any casual observer would be inclined to conclude that the numerical preponderance rested in the scale of the hard *th*, as heard in the word *thing*. But when we come to consider that the, comparatively, few words beginning with soft *th* are precisely those parts of speech which are constantly recurring: *these*, *those*, etc., etc.—then we may well

pause and look a little more closely into this question of numerical preponderance so often prominently brought forward by some of our ardent spelling reformers. Unquestionably the simpler symbol belongs to the softer sound; and this has not been lost sight of in No. 34 (*this*) of the "International Pronunciation Table."

Mr. SKEAT, again, in dealing with this point of numerical preponderance, has fallen, as it seems to me, into an error of a similar description. This eminent glossist suggested some time ago in "The Athenaeum" the complicated, novel and phonetically meaningless symbol of *zh* for the sound of French *j*; and he based his recommendation on the supposed fact that this particular sound is heard in only a few English words, such as *pleasure*, *measure*, etc. Yet Mr. SKEAT has assuredly not lost sight of the undoubted fact that the French sound of *j* is heard in all such words (not forgetting derivatives) ending in *asion*, *esion*, *ision*, *osion*, *usion*; and that these are precisely words in constant use and, for that very reason, most entitled to the simplest symbolisation. In this respect again I would give the preference to Colonel CLINTON's proposal of No. 22 (International Pronunciation Table) for representing the French sound of *j*.

The object of this brief essay has been a two-fold one. The first: to show that this question of Spelling Reform has been yet hardly sufficiently considered (even by those who have shown most laudable zeal in the matter); the second: to raise an appeal to the authorities at the Education Department for a committee of enquiry and discussion.

APPENDIX.

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV., 11—19.

11. O.D. And he said, A cer-tain man had two sons :

E. And hee sed, A ser-ten man had too sunz :

J. And he said, A ser-tain man had too sunz :

C. And hi sed, E ser-ten man had tu sanz :

C. *And hi sed, E ser-ten man had tu sanz :*

C. ³ And hi ¹ sed, E ³ ser-ten ¹ man had tu ³ sanz :

C. ³ *And hi ¹ sed, E ³ ser-ten ¹ man had tu ³ sanz :*

12. O.D. And the young-er of them said to his fa-ther, Fa-ther,

E. And dhi yung-ger ov dhem sed too hiz faa-dher, Faa-dher,

J. And the yung-er ov them said to hiz fa-ther, Fa-ther,

C. And thi yang-ger ov them sed tu hiz fa-ther, Fa-ther,

C. *And thi yang-ger ov them sed to hiz fa-ther, Fa-ther*

C. ³ And ¹ thi ³ yang-ger ¹ ov ¹ them ¹ sed tu ¹ hiz fa-³ther, Fa-³ther,

C. ³ *And ¹ thi ³ yang-ger ¹ ov ¹ them ¹ sed tu ¹ hiz fa-³ther, Fa-³ther*

O.D. give me the por-tion of goods that fall-eth to me.

- { E. giv mee dhi po-ar-shen ov guodz dhat faul-eth too mee.
- J. giv me the por-shon ov goodz that faul-eth to me.
- C. giv mi thi po-er-shan ov gudz that fol-eth tu mi.
- C. *giv mi thi po-er-shan ov gudz that fol-eth tu mi.*
- { C. giv mi thi po-er-shan ov gudz that fol-eth tu mi.
- C. *giv mi thi po-er-shan ov gudz that fol-eth tu mi.*

O.D. And he di-vi-ded un-to them his liv-ing.

- { E. And hee di-vei-ded un-too dhem hiz liv-ing.
- J. And he di-vie-ded un-to them hiz liv-ing.
- C. And hi di-vi-ded an-to them hiz liv-ing.
- C. *And hi di-vi-ded an-to them hiz liv-ing.*
- { C. And hi di-vi-ded an-tu them hiz liv-ing.
- C. *And hi di-vi-ded an-tu them hiz liv-ing.*

13. O.D. And not man-y days af-ter, the young-er son gath-ered all

- { E. And not men-i daiz aaf-ter, dhi yung-ger sun gadh-erd aul
- J. And not men-y daiz af-ter, the yung-er sun gath-erd aul
- C. And not men-i dez af-ter, thi yang-ger san gath-erd ol
- C. *And not men-i dez after, thi yang-ger san gath-erd ol*
- { C. And not men-i dez af-ter, thi yang-ger san gath-erd ol
- C. *And not men-i dez after, thi yang-ger san gath-erd ol*

O.D. to-ge-th-er, and took his jour-ney in-to a far coun-try,

- E. too-ge-dh-er, and tuok hiz jur-ni in-too a far kun-tri,
- J. to-ge-th-er, and tooc hiz jur-ny in-to a far cun-try,
- C. tu-ge-th-er, and tuk hiz djer-ni in-tu e far kan-tri,
- C. *tu-ge-th-er, and tuk hiz djer-ni in-tu e far kan-tri,*
- C. ¹tu-³ge-th-³er, and ³tuk ¹hiz ¹djer-ni ³in-tu ¹e far ¹kan-tri,
- C. ¹tu-³ge-th-³er, and ³tuk ¹hiz ¹djer-ni ³in-tu ¹e far ¹kan-tri,

O.D. and there wast-ed his sub-stance with ri-ot-ous liv-ing.

- E. and dhair waist-ed hiz sub-stans with rei-ut-us liv-ing.
- J. and thair waist-ed hiz sub-stans with rie-ut-us liv-ing.
- C. and the-er west-ed hiz sab-stans with ri-ot-as liv-ing.
- C. *and the-er west-ed hiz sab-stans with ri-ot-as liv-ing.*
- C. ³and ³the-³er west-ed ¹hiz ¹sab-stans ¹with ¹ri-ot-as ²liv-ing.
- C. ³and ³the-³er west-ed ¹hiz ¹sab-stans ¹with ¹ri-ot-as ²liv-ing.

14. O.D. And when he had spent all, there a-rose a might-y fam-

- E. And when hee had spent aul, dhair a-roaz a meit-i fam-
- J. And when he had spent aul, thair a-roez a miet-y fam-
- C. And wen hi had spent ol, the-er a-roz e mit-i fam-
- C. *And wen he had spent ol, the-er a-roz e mit-i fam-*
- C. ³And ¹wen ³hi ³had ¹spent ²ol, ³the-³er a-roz ²e ²mit-i ³fam-
- C. ³And ¹wen ³hi ³had ¹spent ²ol, ³the-³er a-roz ²e ²mit-i ³fam-

O.D. ser-vants of my fa-ther's have bread e-nough and to spare,

- { E. ser-vents ov mei faa-dherz hav bred e-nuf and too spair,
- { J. ser-vants ov my fa-ther's hav bred e-nuf and to spair,
- { C. ser-vants ov mi fa-therz hav bred i-naf and tu spe-er,
- { C *ser-vants ov mi fa-therz hav bred i-naf and tu spe-er,*
- { C. ³ser-¹vents ¹ov ²mi ³fa-³therz ³hav ¹bred ¹i-naf ³and ³tu ³spe-er,
- { C *ser-vants ov mi fa-therz hav bred i-naf and tu spe-er,*

O.D. and I per-ish with hung-er.

- { E. and ei per-ish widh hung-ger.
- { J. and I per-ish with hung-er.
- { C. and I per-ish with hang-ger.
- { C. *and I per-ish with hang-ger.*
- { C. ³and ²I ¹per-¹ish ¹with ¹hang-ger.
- { C. *and I per-ish with hang-ger.*

18. O.D. I will a-rise, and go to my fa-ther, and will say un-

- { E. Ei wil a-reiz, and goa too mei faa-dher, and wil sai un-
- { J. I wil a-riez, and go to my fa-ther, and wil say un-
- { C. I wil a-riz, and go tu mi fa-ther, and wil se an-
- { C. *I will a-riz, and go tu mi fa-ther, and wil se an-*
- { C. ²I ¹wil ²a-riz, ³and ³go ²tu ³mi ³fa-³ther, ³and ¹wil ¹se ¹an-
- { C. *I wil a-riz, and go tu mi fa-ther, and wil se an-*

10.—The appellatives, in the Table, of “*long*” and “*short*” answer, perhaps, more appropriately to the terms “*close*” and “*open*” of Orthoepists.

11.—The designations “French,” “English,” “German,” etc., simply indicate that the sound referred to belongs more to one or two languages in particular than to the other languages.

12.—The term “universal” points out that the symbol, so termed, represents an identical sound used in the majority of languages illustrated.

13.—The lines ——— denote that there is no such sound used in the language to which the vertical column is appropriated.

14.—The three “shades” of sound, as heard in the French word *b(a)sse*, in the Dutch word *b(u)s*, and in the English word *omnib(u)s*, do not seem to require three distinct symbolisations; they have, therefore, been placed under one sound, represented by short universal A¹ (n° 2).

15.—Foreigners will do well to note that in English there are two ways of pronouncing A and AU in many words where these symbols are followed, in the same syllable, by certain consonants: e.g., the words (a)nt, (a)sk, (a)sp, (a)ss, c(a)stle, (a)nsver, adv(a)nce, etc., and, again, (au)nt, l(au)nch, etc., are very generally pronounced with the sound of n° 1 of the Table. The other pronunciation gives the sound of n° 3. On the other hand, it must be admitted that in many words, e.g. (a)ft., p(a)th, etc., and l(au)gh, etc., the A and the AU are quite properly pronounced with the sound of n° 1.

16.—With reference to the vowel-pair of German E it may be observed that in French where *eu* is followed by a consonant which is sounded, as in *leur*, *jeune*, *émeute*, etc., the sound approaches more that of the *short* vowel of the pair, the sound of German *ö* in *G(ö)tz* (e², n° 8).

17.—It is difficult, otherwise than orally, to make clear to most Foreigners, the proper sound of English I² (n° 11). In *French*, the sound, which approaches nearest to the proper sound, is heard in the exclamation (*Ahi!*); in *Italian*, in *Portuguese*, and in *Spanish*, in the word (a)jo or (ay)jo; while, in these same words may be discovered the sound of the short “universal” I¹ (n° 10), viz.: in *French*, in *Ah(i)!*, also in *m(i)en*, *s(i)en*, etc.; in *a(i)jo* or *a(y)jo* in the other three languages.

18.—Dr. Bickers has pointed out that the English way of pronouncing U as *û* (n° 16) arose from the difficulty which the English people found in trying to pronounce the U² (n° 19) in words derived from French. The original pronunciation of these French words met with no equivalent sound in the Anglo-Saxon language; and, even down to this day, English children, in schools, experience the same difficulty. Dr. Bickers has also pointed out that the I— that is to say—the initial half of the compound vowel-sound *û* (n° 16)—is not heard when the U in any syllable is preceded by *j*, *l*, or *r*, and in some instances by *s*; in these cases the U has the simple sound of long universal U (English OO, n° 17). These two points appear to have been, hitherto, overlooked by orthoepists.

19.—The letters C. Q. X. are deemed superfluous. *Hard* C is denoted by K; QU by KW; *soft* C by S; X by KS, GZ, etc.

20.—Throughout the Table the *hard* sound of G (to be always pronounced *Gay*) is alone denoted in the letter G (n° 21). This sound is not heard in the polite language of the Netherlands where the sound given to G corresponds more nearly with the sound of KH (n° 33).

21.—The letter J (n° 22, to be always pronounced as the French pronounce it—*gai*) does not denote the sound either of English J, or of *soft* English G, but the simple sound of French J, as heard in the words *measure*, *invasion*, etc.

22.—The W (n° 26) ought no longer to be called “*double yoo*,” following the letter *Ve* in the alphabet it might well be called *We*. For distinction's sake it is termed *English* W; although indeed the sound which it represents finds a place, however concealed, in several languages besides English; e.g., *oui*, *loi*, *droit*, etc., in French; *Guido*, *quanto*, etc., in Italian; *Schwaben*, *Schweiz*, etc., in German.

23.—The Y (n° 27)—it may finally be remarked—finds no place in the Table as a *vowel*; the reason is that the attributing to this letter the function of a *vowel* as well as of a *consonant*, gives rise to confusion; besides, all the *vowel*-sounds which this symbol is capable of expressing are already variously provided for by vowels in the Table.

